

## WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SKILLS FOR THE ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM OF SCHOOLS?

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### ABSTRACT

It is necessary to create a safe and healthy environment in Azerbaijani educational institutions, to support the moral and psychological health of students, and to form social and emotional skills in students for their progressive development. The importance of organizing a positive and supportive environment in Azerbaijani schools is emphasized in school policy documents. It is observed that students in many general education institutions in Azerbaijan have relatively low socio-emotional skills, mainly in respect for others, empathy, the ability to build effective relationships, collaborative cooperation, and constructive conflict management (Mahmudova 2019). The main of the study is to analyze literature material related to school managers' social emotional skills, and to assess these skills in participants' group. They were 22 participants (directors, assistant director for educational affairs, assistant director for organizational affairs), and selected randomly. The survey material sent by email form, and the results were estimated according to SPSS program. The study material can be effective for school administrative staff, teachers, and for the researchers, who will continue to search this problem in a large population.

**Keywords:** Social emotional learning (SEL), school environment, education system, school leadership.

### Introduction

Psychology has long been searching for abilities that, unlike the traditionally distinguished general intelligence, are associated with the social-emotional sphere of the psyche. Leading experts in the field of psychology of intelligence, such as E. Thorndike, C. Spearman, D. Wechsler, J. Guilford, argued that people differ in their ability to understand other people and manage them, i.e., "to act rationally in human relationships" (Thorndike, 1920, p. 227).

Unfortunately, constructs related to social and emotional abilities have proven difficult to operationalize and distinguish from traditional forms of intelligence. Based on data on the significant overlap of social intelligence with verbal abilities, L. Cronbach (1970) concluded that research in this area was futile. Despite this discouraging start, more and more works devoted to abilities in the social and emotional sphere gradually began to appear in scientific and popular literature. Emotional intelligence was at the center of their interest. In a broad sense, emotional intelligence (EI) includes the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions; this refers to both the subject's own emotions and the emotions of other people (Goleman, 2001; Matthews, Zeidner, Roberts, 2003; Mayer, Salovey, 1997; Lyusin, 2004). The widespread interest in EI indicates that this concept corresponds well to the concepts of everyday psychology. In addition, EI expands the established scientific ideas about the diversity of human abilities, thereby enriching differential psychology (Carroll, 1993).

The concept of EI corresponds to Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993), especially his views on interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. Some authors believe that

EI can be linked to an explanation of emotional phenomena in terms of information processing processes; this approach has already proven its productivity in the development of scientific models of academic intelligence (Matthews et al., 2003). The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the problems of measuring EI and its application in practical work, as well as to make an attempt at theoretical understanding of this construct. The scientific status of the concept of EI is still not high enough due to the fact that there are two alternative models on which its measurement is based. Mixed models include cognitive, personality and motivational traits, due to which they are closely related to adaptation to real life and coping processes (see: Bar-On, 2000). These models propose measuring EI using self-report questionnaires similar to traditional personality inventories. Ability models define EI as a set of abilities measured by tests consisting of items with correct and incorrect answers (Mayer, Caruso, Salovey, 1999). It is important to note that the results of questionnaires and EI tests are poorly correlated with each other, raising questions about the scientific validity of these two approaches.

According to literature materials self-report measurement of EI (questionnaires) were analyzed. Mixed models of EI are characterized by great diversity and differ from each other in the personality characteristics they include. These models interpret EI not as a purely cognitive ability, but as a complex mental formation that has both a cognitive and personality nature. The use of questionnaires assumes that people are able to give an accurate self-report on their behavior and their skills and abilities included in the concept of EI. This assumption seems questionable, since it has been established that self-assessments of cognitive abilities are only moderately related to the results of objective intelligence tests (Paulhus, Lysy, Yik, 1998). Some of the questionnaires were described in the following tables:

*Table 1. EI self-report measurement scales*

Name	General structure	Scale	Item format and scoring method
ECI (Emotional Competence Inventory–360)	Self-awareness, managing one's emotions, awareness of social interactions, social skills	19 factors; 63 items	7-point scales; self-report or expert ratings
EQ-i (Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory)	Intrapersonal EI, interpersonal EI, adaptation, stress management, general mood	15 factors; 132 items	5-point scales; self-report
SSRI (Schutte et al. Self-Report Index)	Hierarchical model of EI consisting of 4 "branches" (as in MSCEIT)	4 factors; 33 items	5-point scales; self-report
TEIQue (Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire)	Combination of EQ-i and MSCEIT structures	15 factors; 144 items	5-point scales; self-report
EmIn (Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire)	Two dimensions: (1) interpersonal and intrapersonal EI, (2) understanding and managing emotions	6 factors; 40 items	4-point scales; self-report

MSCEIT (MayerSalovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test)	4 "branches": identification of emotions, improvement of thinking efficiency, understanding emotions, management of emotions	8 subtests (2 for each "branch"); 130 items	Multiple-choice questions; scoring based on consensus or expert assessments
MEIS (Multi-factor Emotional Intelligence Test)	Hierarchical model of EI, consisting of 4 "branches" (as in MSCEIT)	12 subtests (2-4 for each "branch"); over 200 items	Multiple-choice questions; scoring based on consensus, expert assessments, or preset standards
LEAS (Levels of Emotional Awareness)	Awareness of emotions (basic and complex)	1 scale: 20 scenarios	Free responses; 5 levels qualitative assessment

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is a learning program that enables adolescents to manage emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, feel and demonstrate empathy for others, build and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (CASEL, 2020).

The concept of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) was first coined over 30 years ago by the Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020). Elbertson et al. (2020) note that in 1994, the Fetzer Institute held a conference to address the issues that had been emerging among adolescents in schools for years. The event was attended by many researchers, educators, and others interested in child development, psychology, and academic achievement. After discussing the topic, the term social and emotional learning emerged. Researchers affirm that SEL will enable young people to acquire the skills necessary to achieve and maintain personal well-being and positive relationships throughout their lives (Elbertson et al., 2020). Since its inception, CASEL has defined SEL more specifically and served as a guide for school-based SEL programming (CASEL, 2003). Elbertson et al. (2020) report that since its introduction in 1994, it has come a long way in terms of its inclusion in schools. Over time, schools have come to accept that social and emotional skills can be taught and learned like other academic subjects.

Greenberg (2023) notes that it is important to improve adolescents' thinking, emotions, and behaviors through SEL training so that they can effectively cope with personal and social problems. CASEL (2020) confirms that SEL promotes equity and excellence in education through school-family-community partnerships. According to literature materials (CASEL, 2013) social and emotional competence are differentiated into five criteria: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Researchers (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017) confirm that improving SE skills in people forms their ability to identify, express, understand, regulate and use emotions (Collie, 2020; Hecht and Shin, 2017; Kazimzadeh et al., cited in, 2023). In Azerbaijan, Kazimzadeh et al. (2023) note that social-emotional competencies have different meanings in different contexts. Lange (2021) acknowledges that the SE program is based on the understanding that the best learning occurs within supportive relationships that make learning engaging and meaningful. (Ahmed et al., 2020) believes that teaching SE skills in school plays an important role in the personal development of learners. Lange (2017, as cited in Bialek, 2021) acknowledges that social and emotional skills are effective and important for the development of students as individuals.

According to these literature review materials the study was focused on finding out school administration social emotional skills, and emphasize its effectiveness in their interpersonal relationships.

### Method

The survey that developed by the author consist of 32 questions and describe the following socio-demographic items: age, gender, position, experience (length); and questions that involve socio emotional skills, how they understand their own emotion and feeling, and how accept and estimate others' emotion and feelings. The questionnaire were made according to "Hand to hand" program.

22 school administrative managers participated in the research, and fill the survey form. According to the survey material descriptive statistics were developed and presented.

### Result

The participants' age were  $44 \pm 3,7$  (min.29; max.66). Their experience as a school administration manager starts from 6 months, while the longest term was 33 years ( $7,4 \pm 2,5$ ). The participants' socio demographic features were analyzed and described in the following table:

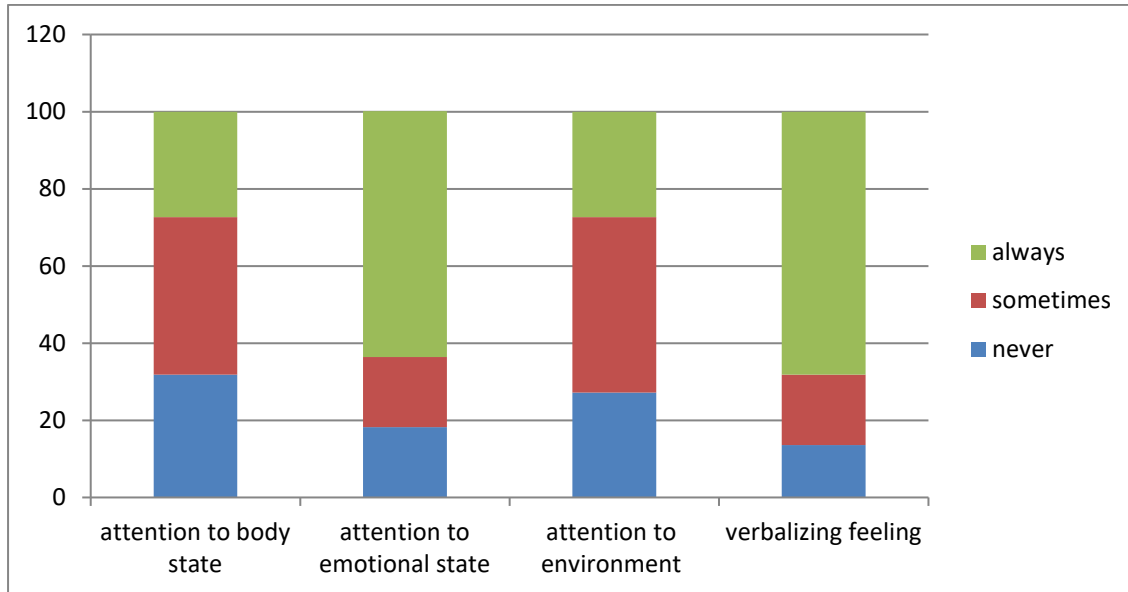
*Table 2. Participants' socio demographic features*

Socio-demographic features			
Director	5	23,8%	
Assistant director for educational affairs	7	33,3%	
Assistant director for organizational affairs	9	42,9%	
men	2	9,1%	
women	20	90,9%	
Total	22	100%	

Only one of the participants mentioned that had practices related to meditation to improve social emotional skills, but 27,3% of them didn't have any practices related to meditation or other spiritual trainings (practices), and didn't want to deal with that experience. Nearly 40% of them said that they had a little experience, but didn't have enough time or opportunity to develop it.

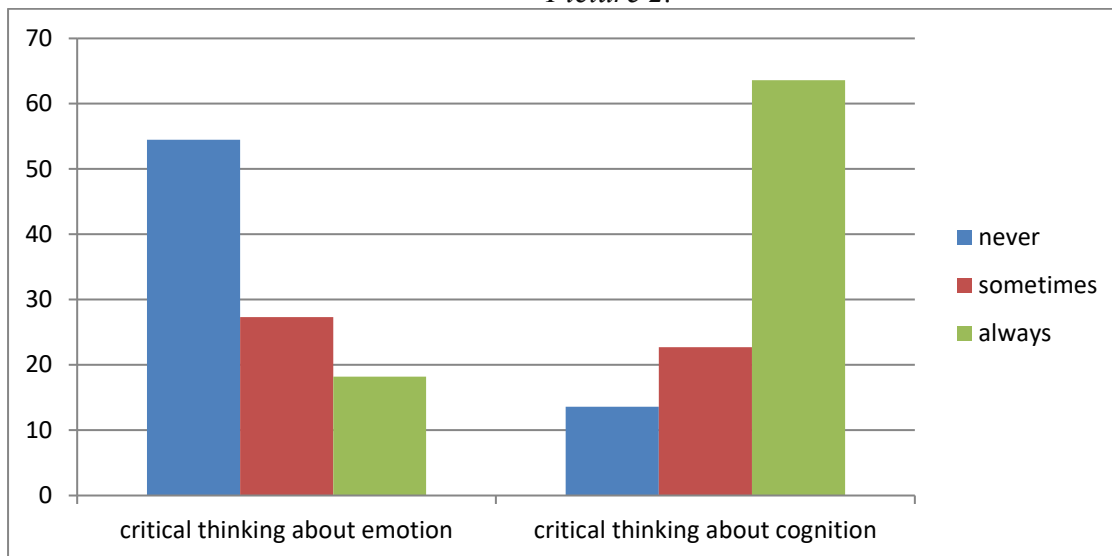
Some of the questions covered person's attention to their own body changing, emotional state, and verbalizing feeling. These results were described in the following charts:

Picture 1.



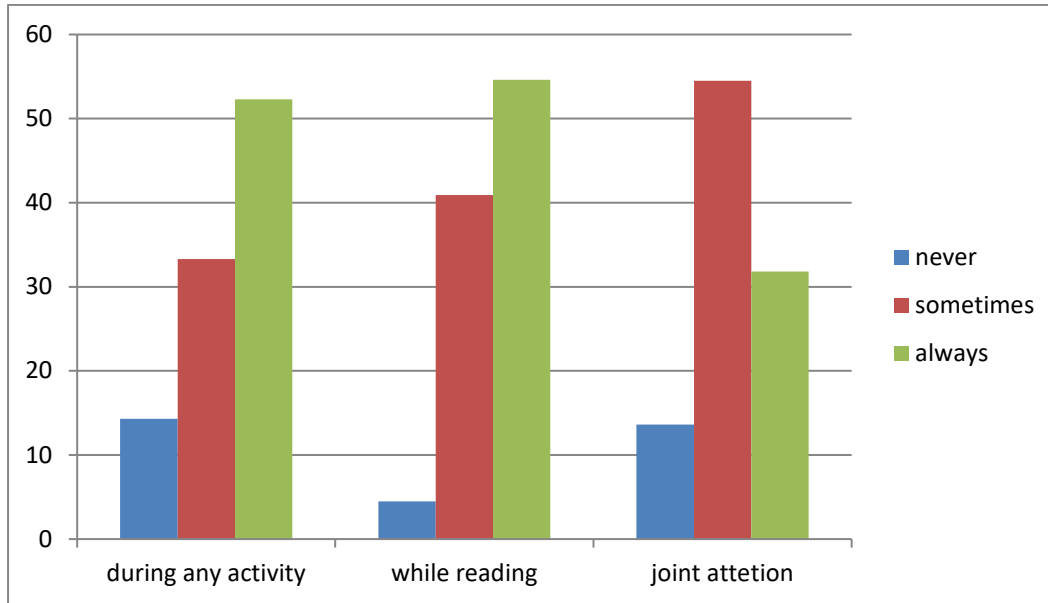
The participants estimated their attention to emotional state, feeling more than other environmental factor, and to their body state (63,7% of them mentioned that they could differentiate and regulate their emotional state, and feeling) ( $df=21, p=0.001, t=2.4$ ). The next group of questions addressed to their critical thinking skills, how they estimate their own feeling, emotion, and cognition. The figures were described in the following charts.

Picture 2.



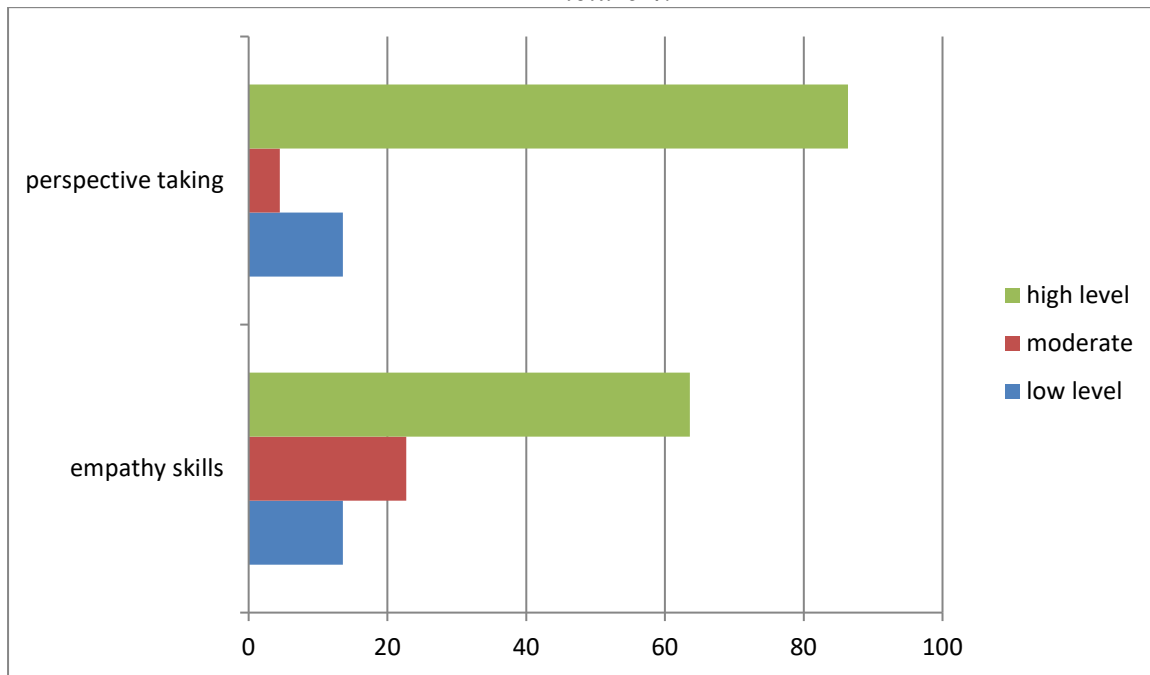
According the charts participants didn't prefer to think, criticize their emotion (only 18.2%), while majority of them (63.6%) answered that they always think about thoughts, cognition. There were special items that help them to assess their concentration feature. The school managers mentioned that they could concentrate on their responsibility, and didn't have any problem related to sharing their attention more than one duty in the same time. They could focus on their daily activity (52.3%), while reading (54.6%), and present joint attention skills sometimes (54.5%), and frequently (31.8%) ( $df=20, p=0.001, t=3.6, F=5,8$ ). 50% of the participants mentioned that he/she could motivate themselves, when they had any problem, while 50% mentioned they didn't have any abilities, or sometimes could motivate themselves ( $df=20, p=0.001, t=5.3 F=6.9$ ).

Picture 3.



The last items described their empathy abilities, and how they estimate the situation from others’ point of view. According their self assessment results it can be summarized that the school managers could demonstrate their empathy abilities, and perspective taking in different situation (respectively, 63.6%, 86.4%).

Picture 4.



**Conclusion**

According to literature review and questionnaire results it can be emphasized that school managers, directors, their assistants, and staff need special programs related improving their social emotional skills. Researches confirms that a positive school climate is associated with increased academic achievement, effective prevention of bullying, and healthy student development (Cohen et al., 2009; Koth et al., 2008). Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process of acquiring basic skills for identifying and managing emotions, setting and achieving positive goals, appreciating the perspectives of others, building and maintaining positive

relationships, making responsible decisions, and managing interpersonal situations constructively (Elias et al., 1997). One of the SEL intervention is a training program focused on improving effective communication and interpersonal skills in the school environment (Hand in Hand, 2018). SEL developed a training program for the school community, aimed at teachers, school leaders, and students. these program can be effective for school leaders, directors, and staff to improve their academic and social activity results.

**Limitation:** The first limitation of the research is related to number of participants. The survey can be extended for the future studies. The next limitation is associated the method of the study. The result of the survey was analyzed by quantitative approach. It can be more effective using both of the quantitative and qualitative approach. Moreover using face-to face interview with school manager, and asking their personal approach to the problem can give more detailed information related to this problem. The research can be continued and advanced by the researchers group, and in large population.

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